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The Contribution of a Member of the
Society of Friends to a Lady's Album

1827

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THE CONTRIBUTION

OF A

MEMBER OF THE SOCIETY OF FRIENDS,

TO A

Lady's Album.

SECOND EDITION.

Jos. John Gurney

Jan 11 1895

LONDON:

HARVEY AND DARTON, GRACECHURCH STREET;
EDMUND FRY, HOUNDSDITCH; AND S. WILKIN, NORWICH.

1827.

Price Threepence.

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JUL 9 1935

TO LADY P——

MY DEAR FRIEND,

HAVING in the composition of my mind little that is poetic, and less that is epigrammatic, I will take the liberty of conversing with thee, though it be through the medium of an Album, in *the form of a letter*; and being, as thou knowest, a plain man—not to say, a plain quaker—I will venture to throw out a few observations to one who, I am sure, will not misinterpret me, on the present state of the “*religious world*.”

It must, I think, be allowed by the spiritual reader of Scripture, that the *church of Christ* is principally addressed in the following animated language of ancient inspiration—“Awake, awake; put on thy *strength*, O Zion; put on thy *beautiful garments*, O Jerusalem, the holy city; for henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean. *Shake thyself from the dust*; arise and sit down, O Jerusalem: loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion.” Isa. lii, 1, 2.

And well would it be, my dear friend, were the

universal society of God's people, I mean of those who really love the Lord Jesus Christ, more clothed in their *strength*—more arrayed in their *beautiful* garments—more shaken from the dust of the earth—and more entirely loosed from the bands which have been imposed upon them by the inventions and systems of man!

It seems strange that so imperfect a person as myself should cry out for a more evident advance towards perfection in others; but, strange as it may appear, I will now take the liberty of dropping a few hints to a friend whom I highly esteem, respecting the present defects, and the probable future improvement, of the *religious world*.

To begin, then, I may venture to confess my opinion, that religious persons, in the present day, are not quite enough alive to the consideration, that, under the glorious Gospel dispensation, the worship of God is to be spiritual; not in *word*, so much as in *power*; not in the form, but in the reality; not in the shadow, but in the substance; not in the type, but in the antitype. The system of worship

No person of serious reflection would, I presume, object to those outward institutions—such as the Sabbath day, appointed hours and places of meeting, &c.—which are essential, in the order of Providence, to the congregational worship of the Deity; but, whether that worship ought not, under the full light of the Gospel of Christ, to be conducted on more spiritual principles than is now generally the case, is a question well worthy of the consideration of every Christian.

It has long appeared to me that the “*religious world*,” in the worship of our heavenly Father, is prone to place too much dependence on *ceremonies*, on *ministers*, and on *words*. Allow me to make a very few observations on each of these points; and believe me that my remarks are not suggested by any *ex parte* feelings as a *quaker*, but by an *impartial* desire to behold the day, when Zion shall array herself in all her strength, her loveliness, and her beauty.

The Society of Friends have always considered it right to disuse the outward ceremonials of baptism and the supper. Far be it from me to attempt to persuade any brother or sister, who may be truly edified through the medium of these ordinances, to follow this example. But I may be permitted to remark that these ceremonies have been found in various ages of the church—more perhaps than any other thing—the occasions of

intricate and tiresome discussion—of angry and most unedifying dispute—of doubt, division, and schism—and, above all, of cruel and shameless persecution. And hence the pious churchwoman may so far accompany the quaker as to conclude, not indeed that the ordinances themselves are without foundation, but that a far greater *stress* has been laid upon them by Christians than truly consists either with the welfare of man or with the glory of God.

Possibly, this observation may have its application, in some degree, to the serious part of Christendom, as well as to the mere professors. I confess I can never succeed in dispossessing myself of feelings of a somewhat jealous, though, I trust, not ungodly, nature—when I hear the reports of the zealous agents of our Jewish and Missionary Societies, who appear to be so eager to declare to us, how many of the Jews—how many of the Gentiles—have been *baptized*. Alas! what will the application of water do for them, if they are not introduced to the church by the

administrations, been gathered, as they believe, into the fold of Christ. But, when I remember how prone we are, by nature, to fix our hearts on that which is outward, instead of that which is inward—and to trust in any thing rather than the living God—I cannot but hold this to be a dangerous *misnomer*.

On the same principles, it is always painful to me to hear of the eagerness, so often manifested by serious Christians, to administer the ceremonial bread and wine to their *dying* friends; and of the delight which *dying* Christians are as often described as taking in the ceremony. When I hear of such things, I am ready to say in my heart, O! for a yet higher standard! Shall it be, that in the near approach of that solemn hour which is to usher in his immortal soul to perfect happiness in the presence of the Lamb—shall it be, that, at such a time, the Christian has yet need to be reminded, *by a type*, that Christ died for his sins? Shall it be, that, at such a season, he may not repose on the bosom and die in the arms of Jesus, without the intervention of any ceremony *appertaining to the flesh*, however solemn and sacred that ceremony may be?

To be brief on this interesting subject, permit me, without pretending, on the present occasion, to say a syllable for the *disuse* of these things, to express an earnest desire that the religious world

may be brought to lay *less* stress on the ceremonial affusion of water, and more on that celestial baptism of which Christ is the Author, and which can alone renovate the soul; that they may also learn to detach their *dependence* from the supper of bread and wine; and strive with greater earnestness, *independently of every outward ceremony*, to commune with one another in spirit; and, by a living faith, to feed together on the body and blood of Christ our Lord.

My next two heads of observation I must dismiss more briefly.

I am satisfied that Lady P—— does not want the intervention of a plain quaker, in order to be convinced that professing Christians—and even the more serious among them—are prone to place too great a dependence on the *ministry* of man in *general*, and on *individual ministers in particular*. I am confident she will agree with me in the opinion, that there is to be found amongst us, in the “religious world,” too much of the pinning of our faith on the sleeve of our neigh-

truth, and no lie. Under the New Covenant, we have no longer need to say, every one to his brother, and every one to his neighbour, Know the Lord; for we may all know him for ourselves, from the least to the greatest of us. Why may we not sit every one under his *own* vine, and every one under his *own* fig-tree? Human ministry is good in its season, no doubt. Far be it from me to depreciate or to decry it; for I can say for myself, "Woe is me, if I preach not the Gospel." But O! for the *fuller* accomplishment of the promise of God to his Church—"All thy children shall be *taught of the Lord*, and great shall be the peace of thy children!"

To pass on to my third and *almost* identical subject, the religious world is surely far too eager to feed and to be fed with *words*.

How many are there who may, to a certain extent, be justly considered serious in their views of religion, who are ready enough both to hear much, and to talk much, on the sacred subject, but who are strangers, nevertheless, to that deep, inward exercise of mind, in which the Christian is brought to a conformity with the sufferings of Christ; and, in a spiritual sense, is "buried with him in baptism?"

How unspeakably desirable is it that the "religious world" should now at length *begin* to learn the lesson of *true silence*; I mean of that prostration and humiliation of soul, in which the crea-

ture dares not act in his own strength, or light his lamp with sparks of his own kindling; but is reduced to absolute quiescence, in the presence and under the power of his Creator. "Be still," said Jehovah, "and KNOW that I am God." Such a condition of soul is most suitably accompanied (at times at least) by the corresponding stillness and silence of the body. Surely, my dear friend, if there were times (and they not a few) in the *public* as well as *private* worship of Christians, in which (even in *this* sense) *tongues* were known to cease, and *prophecies* to fail, and God in Christ to be ALL IN ALL, it would indeed tend to the edification—or I should rather say, to the more perfect *settlement*—of the church universal. The spiritual temple, in this blessed Gospel-day, like the outward edifice in the days of Solomon, would often be so filled with the glory of God, that there would be "no *place* for the priest to minister."

Thus have I endeavoured to unfold and justify my sentiment, that, in order to the arising of ZION, in her strength her beauty and her glory her

On this branch of the subject, however, I will now content myself with a single observation. I am persuaded that, were serious Christians, of every denomination, bold and honest enough to *face* the precept of Jesus, *Love your enemies*; and were they thoroughly imbued with the spirit of that precept—no earthly consideration—no plea of obedience to human authorities—no plea of self-defence—would induce them ever to take part in that greatest of human abominations, that most desolating of the scourges of the world,—the practice of WAR.

Pray excuse my having filled so many of thy pages; and

Believe me to be

Thy affectionate friend.

(*D. J. Gurney*)

NORWICH:

PRINTED BY S. WILKIN, UPPER HAYMARKET.

JUNE 26TH, MDCCCXVII.







